

Child Poverty: Muncie compared with Derry

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by

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Abstract

Child poverty is a worldwide phenomenon, even in developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This thesis explores the issue at national and local levels. A brief description of Johnson's War on Poverty is given, along with national poverty rates, before delving into the poverty rates of Muncie, Indiana, and the Youth Initiative that has been set forth by TEAMwork for Quality Living. Child deprivation within the United Kingdom is explored, with focus on Northern Ireland. A national initiative, the Child Poverty Act 2010 is discussed. Rates in Derry, Northern Ireland (also known as Londonderry) are presented, along with the Children & Young People Action Plan 2012-2015 set forth by Derry City Council.

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Child Poverty: Muncie compared with Derry

Until we deal with child poverty and its spiraling circles of injustice, we cannot frame a progressive, democratic policy agenda that promotes the healthy development, well-being, and equality of life chances for children. (Falk, 2012).

Child poverty is a worldwide crisis, and does not only affect developing countries. In the United States alone, there are 16.1 million children living in poverty (NCCP, 2013). In the whole of the United Kingdom, 3.5 million children live in deprivation (CPAG, 2014b). [It is important to note that in research, children in the United States are considered ages 1-18 and 0-15 in the United Kingdom]. Initiatives to decrease this number are being taken in each country of the United Kingdom under the Child Poverty Act 2010.

Poverty in the United States

As one of the world's leading industrialized nations, the United States is far behind in terms of its child poverty rate. In a comparison of child poverty rates between 35 industrialized nations, including the United Kingdom, the United States ranked second to highest, falling only below Romania (UNICEF, 2012). According to Falk (2012), the United States spends \$794/child each year, which appears quite lacking when compared to the expenses allotted by Sweden (\$6,409/child), Norway (\$6,425/child), and Denmark (\$8,126).

Certain variables play a role in the division of poverty among children in the United States. Considered factors studied include race, ethnicity, region and area of residence, parent's country of birth, parent's level of education, and parent's employment (NCCP, 2013). When considering race, a gap becomes apparent: 31% of white children

(12.1 million), 65% of black children (6.5 million), and 65% of Hispanic children (11 million) live in poverty. Higher levels of parent education have been shown to decrease the chance of a child living in poverty. For example, 86% of children (7.4 million) with parents who have less than a high school degree live in poverty and the percentage levels progressively decrease as the education levels increase. When looking into employment levels, only 30% of children with parents who hold a full-time job live in poverty, while 89% of children whose parents are unemployed live in poverty (NCCP, 2013). This is why, as Lamy (2013) discusses, the primary goal of most anti-poverty initiatives aim to increase the earnings of individuals (through employment), which most often requires an increase in education.

National Initiatives

When running for the presidency, Kennedy called attention to the weakness in the American economy, especially its sluggish rate of economic growth. He insisted that too many of America's workers were unemployed, but did not do much to focus on national poverty during the first two years of his term as president. The initiative to fight poverty came about after a discussion with the chairman of his Council of Economic Advisors, Walter Heller. President Kennedy then requested an investigation on and recommendations for a practical anti-poverty program that could be enacted during his presidency (Brauer, 1982).

Kennedy's economic advisors recognized that full employment and long-term growth could work to effectively reduce poverty. They also saw investing in American youth as the best way to fight the issue. Community programs were suggested as an option:

Rather than developing a ‘program’ which simply adds funds to existing across-the-board programs, or creates new programs in which a large part of the funds are spent on those whose need is marginal, we ought to make a concentrated effort to assist those whose needs are substantial (Brauer, 1982, p. 110).

Kennedy’s advisors saw this approach as mobilizing people at a local level, including those who had previously been uninvolved. After Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson was approached about the creation of a fight against poverty (Brauer, 1982, p. 113) and agreed that the process should continue.

The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) was enacted in 1964 by President Johnson, as part of his Great Society legislative agenda to fight the metaphorical War on Poverty. The EOA was meant to provide job training, adult education, and loans to small businesses in order to attack the roots of unemployment and poverty. In order to do so, the federal government created a multitude of new programs to ensure the effectiveness of the EOA (Garson, 2013). These programs included the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Volunteer Services in America (VISTA), Job Corps, and Head Start (CAFCA, n.d.).

As part of this legislative act, Community Action Agencies (CAA) were also formed in order to provide community outreach. Programs created included Senior Centers, Family Planning, Summer Youth Programs, Foster Grandparents, and Community Health Centers. The CAAs continued to be federally funded until the Community Services Block Grant Act was passed in 1981 (Garson, 2013).

The EOA begins by stating:

It is the policy of the United States to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this nation by opening, to everyone, the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity. (EOA, 1964).

The EOA laid the groundwork for a national fight against poverty, even years in the future. The results can still be seen today in programs such as Muncie's TEAMwork for Quality Living. Though the EOA does not fund TEAMwork, the Act set a standard in the US and increased awareness for the help needed by those living in poverty.

Poverty in Muncie, Indiana

Muncie, Indiana has high levels of poverty when compared to other cities at both a state and national level. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Muncie has the third highest rate of poverty in Indiana cities (behind only Gary and East Chicago) (as cited in Muncie Before 5, 2012). In 2007, poverty levels in Muncie ranked ninth in the nation when compared to other cities with less than 65,000 residents, as Muncie did at the time (Muncie before 5, 2012).

In 2013, the population estimate for Muncie was 70,316. Of this number, 17.8% were individuals under age 18 (according to the 2010 estimate). Between 2008 and 2012, the percentage of persons below poverty level was 31.5% (United States Census Bureau, 2013). In comparison to 2012 estimates, Indiana as a whole had a 14.7% poverty level, just barely under the 14.9% national rate. This means that the poverty level in Muncie is 113.5% of the Indiana average and 111.5% of the U.S. average (Areavibes, 2012). According to TEAMwork for Quality Living, 20,391 people were on food stamps in 2013, with 78% of children in Muncie Community Schools on free and reduced lunch

(2014). The organization works to reduce these statistics by working with families and children living in poverty in the area.

Muncie Initiative

Background. TEAMwork for Quality Living began in 1996 with the initial intent to make Delaware County a better place to work, live, and play. The original mission of TEAMwork was “supporting volunteers as they work to build a stronger community” (TEAMwork, 2013). The program did not begin with one specific focus; instead, it focused its energies in different areas to improve the community. These focuses included a campaign against lead-based products and seminars focused on fatherhood. The program continued with this vague focus until it was chosen to participate in the 2001 *All America City* National Awards (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

The conference recognizes ten communities a year that are working to promote healthy living environments through “civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness, innovation, and community impact” (AAC, 2014). TEAMwork went representing Delaware County and was selected for the finals. In this round, the group was asked what specific work they were doing to combat poverty in the community. Several answers were given, such as certain organizations handling poor relief and the work of the Family and Social Services Administration, but nothing was being done explicitly as a community (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

Participation in the conference made it clear that Delaware County’s (and Muncie’s) greatest need was help focused on poverty. The entire program was reshaped, emerging with the mission: “Empowering people in poverty toward self-sufficiency” (TEAMwork, 2014, p. 1). It was decided that TEAMwork would still work with

community volunteers, but would now focus on mobilizing the community to address the issue of poverty (TEAMwork, 2014) using the Circles® approach, originally initiated by Move the Mountain Leadership Center. TEAMwork has now been a part of the Circles® community for over eight years. (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

Today. The idea behind the Circles® approach is to focus on eradicating poverty one family at a time by engaging the community (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

Circles® is an innovative model based on a body of research suggesting that in order for families with low income to improve their situation, they must have *bonding social capital* within the community, *bridging social capital* to access the resources contained by higher income networks, and *linking social capital* that connects the first two with public institutions (Circles®, n.d.).

A Circle begins with a family, which can take several different forms: An individual, an individual with children, a couple, or a couple with children. The family must be motivated and willing to work to get out of poverty. A 16-week training class is begun for the family, during which they discuss what they believe placed them in poverty, what is keeping them in poverty, and solutions to achieve their goal of leaving poverty (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

After a varying amount of time, the family is given accountability partners, known as Allies. The Allies are individuals with middle or upper income, who work with the family to offer support. With the assistance of their Allies, the family sets goals that are specific to their situation. These individuals must also go through a training period, receiving approximately 40-hours of training over the span of a year (D. Watson,

personal communication, October 6, 2014). This training consists of providing Allies with tools to address poverty and covers topics such as the hidden rules of class, which are addressed later in this paper (Circles®, n.d.).

The idea of a “Circle of Support” comes into play when the family begins their journey with Circles®. It begins with the adult member(s) of the family as the Circle Leader(s). The family’s Allies form an extension of this circle, usually consisting of two to four individuals. The training of both parts, the Circle Leader training and the Ally training, forms two more extensions of the supportive circle (Circles®, n.d.). The Circles come together once a week for food, networking, and support at events called “Circles® Café”. Once a month, a “Big View Meeting” occurs that is open to the public, “where systemic barriers encountered by Circle leaders are discussed and plans are made to address the necessary community, governmental, and policy constraints” (Circles®, n.d.).

One is unable to fully understand the work with the children of the families until the Circles® concept is wholly explained, as the initiative was not originally written to include children. The idea was that the change would be most likely to occur with the head(s) of the families, but support would be provided to the children if needed. For example, each circle was encouraged to do social activities outside of the weekly meetings and invite their children. It was also assumed that if the children had any need of a particular resource, the allies would be able to provide support in that particular area (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014).

Youth Initiative. TEAMwork recently realized the importance of working with the children of the Circles® families and implemented several new programs, including the weekly Youth Enrichment Program. The program is essentially Circles® for only the

children and meets during the normal weekly Circles® meetings, providing a combination of fun and learning (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014). The weekly groups discuss similar topics as the adult Circles® meetings and addresses the realities of poverty. The groups differ in that they focus on the next generation getting out of poverty, working to mobilize the younger generation and teaching them how to navigate the middle-class.

The Youth Enrichment Program is through a partnership with a nearby college, Ball State University, and takes a sociological approach to responding to poverty in the community, including ideas of social networks, social capital, and social norms. The student interns are not trained as teachers, but take on the role of mentors to the children in the program. Topics covered by the interns in these role model positions include college (i.e. what is it like? What are different experiences in college? How do you get into college?) and careers, including the idea of jobs versus careers and career exploration. These topics are areas that the children's families may not be able to help them navigate, primarily because the group focuses on "socializing to the norms, values, and expectations of the middle class" (M. Messineo, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Dr. Melinda Messineo heads the Youth Enrichment Program for TEAMwork and discussed the controversial setup of the program, as it could be seen as devaluing the norms of the lower class. It is difficult to effectively affirm the values of the working class, but also find a way to teach the children how to navigate into higher paying jobs. The children are often already experiencing cultural clashes between home and school

and the Circles® interns work with the children to discern how to traverse these clashes (M. Messineo, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Surviving in the middle-class world when coming from poverty often requires an understanding of the hidden class rules. These rules include attitudes toward people, money, time, and education (M. Messineo, personal communication, October 14, 2014). Those in poverty, for example, tend to revere education, but do not see it as a reality. In poverty, money is seen as something to be spent immediately upon receiving. Those in middle-class, however, view money as something to be managed. In terms of education, the middle-class sees this as imperative to making money in the future (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 1999).

The current curriculum is based on the subject of financial literacy, building on the aforementioned hidden class rules regarding money. This seven-week program begins with a bank visit so that the children, and their parents, feel more comfortable with the idea of placing their money in a bank. According to Messineo (personal communication, October 14, 2014), the program is “beyond just learning the vocabulary, but also transitioning from the way of thinking about money as a reflection of your social class.” The program allows the adolescent participants to apply for jobs (such as cleaning the table or putting the chairs away after meetings) and earn up to five real dollars a week. During the seventh week, the earned money (up to \$25) will be placed in a savings account created specifically for each student participant. Watson (personal communication, October 6, 2014) sees the program as a tool to teach families and children in poverty not to fear the banks, but instead to build their trust in them and use as a tool in their effort to move out of poverty.

The financial literacy program is coupled with an incentive program for good behavior. After each meeting, the participating children are given “behavior bucks”, depending on their conduct during the session. The “bucks” can later be spent at the TEAMwork store, located within the office and filled with donated items (D. Watson, personal communication, October 6, 2014). This disciplinary model is consistent with what is used in the Muncie school system and its purpose is to reinforce the idea that actions have consequences and positive behavior can result in positive outcomes (M. Messineo, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

In the spring, the youth will be covering a curriculum that deals with self-esteem and bullying. Many of the topics will focus on anger-management in hopes that the children will become cognizant of their own emotional states and responses. By doing so, they will learn how certain emotional responses have the potential to escalate conflict while others do not (M. Messineo, personal communication, October 14, 2014). By learning to manage their anger and control their frustrations with their peers and teachers, this curriculum will increase the chances that the participating youth are able to stay in school, a step towards leaving poverty.

According to Messineo (personal communication, October 14, 2014): “There is a huge impact on the adults [in Circles®], but it is very difficult for them to actually get out of poverty...the inter-generational leaps happen with the kids.” The program recognizes the importance of educating the children with tools to recognize hidden class rules and socializing them to the norms of the middle class, so they have the instruments necessary to be successful in moving out of poverty.

Strengths. TEAMwork for Quality Living is truly a community-based organization and has successfully created a large network of supporters and partners within the community. The organization places a large focus on relationships, as seen by the formation of each family's Circle. These quality relationships result in the trust of the clients and families, ensuring effective services are being maintained. Though the Youth Enrichment program is relatively new, there is already a solid foundation in place to work off of in the future.

Weaknesses. Messineo (personal communication, October 16, 2014) mentioned the difficulty of working with children in poverty is that their lives are often very unstable due to difficulties faced by their families. This results in a variance in attendance from week to week. Since there is nothing that can be done to ensure the attendance of the youth each week, the program must find a way to become flexible and responsive to the needs of the youth and their families.

TEAMwork does not receive funding from a state or national level (as the organization is not a direct result of the EOA). Instead, the organization is primarily backed by grants and private donations. The grants vary from year to year and often do not last more than a year, excluding a United Way grant that has lasted for three years. Due to the unpredictability of funding, the organization is not always able to provide all the resources needed for their clients. At certain points in their history, there have been times in which they were unable to fund a number of their staff members (D. Watson, personal communication, October 16, 2014).

It is interesting to compare poverty rates and initiatives (both federal and local) between two developed, powerful nations. Many differences (and similarities) may be

noticed between those already discussed, in the US and those to be discussed, in the UK. Just as TEAMwork for Quality Living is not a direct result of the EOA, the Derry City Action Plan is not a direct result of the UK's Child Poverty Act 2010. Though the local initiatives do not directly stem from the federal proposals, they all work to decrease poverty in the discussed locations, as seen in the following discussion.

Poverty in the United Kingdom

In 2011, there were 2.3 million children in poverty in the United Kingdom, a decrease from the 2.6 million in 2010 (HM Government, 2012). According to a measure by UNICEF (2012), comparing the percent of children living in household with an equivalent income lower than 50% of the national median, the United Kingdom is ranked 22nd out of a total listing of 35 developed countries, with 12.1% of children living in such households.

Similar variables to child poverty in the United States are considered a factor to child deprivation in the United Kingdom, including ethnicity and region of residence. Another factor considered is that of the family's work status; a higher percentage of children in workless families are in poverty (38%), compared to children in families where at least one parent/head of the household is employed (only 13%). If living in a single-parent household, the chances of living in poverty are also influenced by parental work status. The likelihood of living in poverty is reduced if the single parent is working full-time (12% chance) as compared to working part-time (16%) or not at all (30%). It is important to note, according to the Department for Work and Pensions, that children living in single-parent households are more likely to live in poverty than in households with two parents (as cited in HM Government, 2012).

Another variable, one not often mentioned in relation to poverty in the United States, is that of family size. Children living in families with three or more children are more likely to live in poverty (22%) than children from smaller families (16%). As seen in the United States, children living in households headed by an ethnic minority are more likely to live in poverty. Disability is also seen playing a role; in 2013, 21% of children in families with a member living with a disability lived in poverty. The region/country in which the child resides also tends to play a large role in child deprivation. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, children in England (17%) and Scotland (17%) are less likely to live in impoverished households than children in Northern Ireland (21%) and Wales (23%) (as cited in HM Government, 2012).

According to Horgan (2005), evidence shows that Northern Ireland, along with Wales, has higher levels of child deprivation than most other regions in the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, 38% of children live in households that are in the bottom 30% of household income. Several factors are considered in the higher rates of child deprivation in Northern Ireland, including unemployment, higher cost of living, low income, and slightly larger families.

In 2001, 29.5% of households in England and Wales had children, while 36.5% of households in Northern Ireland had children. Compared to 19% in Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland), 32% of children in Northern Ireland live in households whose only income derives from government benefits. It is important to note that these 32% of children are not evenly dispersed across the country; their numbers are mainly concentrated in the Northwestern region of the country (where Derry/Londonderry is located). Employed households in Northern Ireland earn an average of 20% less than the

rest of the United Kingdom, with the average household income being 22% lower than the UK average. As in the United Kingdom, but with a higher percentage, high levels of unemployment and underemployment remain a large issue in influencing the deprivation levels in Northern Ireland (Horgan, 2005).

National Initiatives

In 1999, the former Prime Minister Blair made a pledge to halve the number of children in poverty (within the UK) by 2010 and completely eradicate the issue by 2020 (CPAG, 2014a). Between the years of 1999 and 2009, a 50% reduction in the rate of child poverty was achieved, dropping from 3.4 million to 1.8 million. Strategies taken include providing extensive family supports by local authorities, expanding child care facilities, and increasing the minimum wage (Waldfogel, 2010). Within the decade, the UK's spending on child supports increased dramatically to \$3,563/child (Falk, 2012). As a result of the nation's increased focus on child poverty, the Child Poverty Act was enacted in 2010, setting "legally binding targets for reducing child poverty" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 6).

Under the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Child Poverty Commission was formed and given the responsibility of seeing that the initiatives set forth are carried out. These initiatives include a creation of strategies by different governing bodies. For example, the Secretary of State was given the responsibility of creating a UK strategy; the Scottish ministers, a Scottish strategy; and the Northern Ireland department, a strategy for Northern Ireland (Child Poverty Act, 2010).

The Child Poverty Act 2010 uses four measures: relative income, combined low income and material deprivation, absolute income, and persistent poverty. Relative

income is defined as a household income that is 60% less than the current median income. Combined low income and material deprivation measures the number of children who experience material deprivation and live in households with an income less than 70% of the current median income. Absolute income considers household incomes that are less than 60% of the 2010/2011 median income, adjusted for inflation. The final measure, persistent poverty, looks for household incomes that are less than 60% of the current median and have been so for at least three of the previous four years (HM Government, 2012).

Poverty in Derry, Northern Ireland

Derry, Northern Ireland has the fourth highest rate of child poverty among cities within the United Kingdom, with 35% of children living in poverty (DCC, n.d.-c). As of the 2013 census, Derry has 108,610 occupants, with 24,248 being children aged 0-15 years (NINIS). In 2012, 25.6% of children under 16 were living in income support households, decreased by 13.5% from 2006 (DCC, n.d.-c) and the city had a 6.0% unemployment rate (NISRA, 2014).

In Northern Ireland itself, Derry is the second largest city, but it is ranked the third most deprived government district, with some of the most deprived wards (the smallest administrative divisions) (NINIS, 2013). There are long-term underlying political issues that contribute to the high poverty levels in Derry (and all of Northern Ireland). These include sectarianism, racism, marginalization, and lack of community cohesion (British Council, 2010). The division in Northern Ireland, seen across the city of Derry, is evident in terms of education and residential patterns, which have resulted in a lack of shared social services, social spaces, and identity (British Council, 2010).

The Troubles began in 1968 and lasted for thirty more years, with violence erupting over a debate on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (BBC, 2014). The conflict has since caused a disruption in the distribution of social services and led to an increase in the discriminating application of said services (Thomas & Jesse, 2011). Negative impacts can also be seen in public health rates, low short-term economic growth rates, and the limiting of capital stocks (Thomas & Jesse, 2011). In recent years, the Derry City Council (DCC) has set out to repair the damage left by the Troubles by helping to better the lives of children and families within the city.

Derry Initiative

Following the Child Poverty Act 2010, The Derry City Council set out an initiative with the vision “to be instrumental in tackling specific issues that affect our Children and Young People and improve the lives of all Children and Young people within the Derry City Council area through active engagement and participation” (DCC, n.d.-a). The set initiative, DCC Children & Young People Action Plan 2012-2015, sets out key approaches to improving the lives of children within the city.

The Action Plan ultimately sets out six outcomes the Council would like to see in the city: Healthy; Enjoying, learning, and achieving; Living in safety and with stability; Experiencing economic and environmental well-being; Contributing positively to community and society; and Living in society that respects their rights. In order to meet these six outcomes, the framework lays out seven components: Theme/Outcome Area, Actions, Outcomes, Target Group, Location, Time-Frame, and Budget. The “Theme/Outcome Area” refers to the six aforementioned outcomes; one or more is listed for each initiative. The “Actions” portion lays out what plans are being carried to achieve

the desired outcome area(s), while the “Outcomes” section specifies what the Council would like to see when the areas are achieved. The “Target Group” can be one of many: Children and Young People, families, parents, and/or caregivers. “Location” varies as well between: Citywide, citywide and district area, waterside, rural, neighborhood renewal area, and/or specific community area (DCC, n.d.-b).

While not all Theme and Outcome areas specifically refer to decreasing deprivation in the area, most, if not all, contribute in some way through positive spillover effects. For example, one set strategy in the Action Plan aims for the economic well-being of the community, as well as a happy and healthy community with residents living in a society that respects their rights. This specific proposed initiative sets forth one plan of action: “to “work in partnership with relevant Groups/Organisations to research & develop a framework that translates Child Poverty into grass roots practice.” The section lays out five anticipated outcomes, including increased knowledge and understanding of child poverty and improved conditions for children and families. The initiative is aimed at children and young people, specifically in the Citywide and district area (DCC, n.d.-b).

Strengths. The Action Plan was formulated by a steering committee made up of representatives from the community, not just staff members of the Derry City Council. Members included organizations such as Derry Healthy Cities, Early Years – the Organisation for Young People, and Youth Action. The Department of Social Development was also involved, as well as four councilors from DCC.

As seen in the make-up of the steering committee, the Plan aimed to promote interagency partnerships within the community, all focusing on the betterment of children and young people. During the creation of the Plan, the committee consulted with over

2,500 children and young people within and around Derry and this feedback is interwoven into the document. Not only was the Plan created with a focus on community agencies and those it pertains to, but it states that it also is in line with regional, national, and international initiatives.

Weaknesses. Though the funding column suggests active searching for funds, only five of the 27 initiatives have set finances; the rest are marked non-applicable and/or state they are to be decided at a later date. Though the Plan was set to be reviewed again in 2013, with several finances decided then, there has been no such update. This clearly will deter the actual implementation of the initiatives; without funding, they will be unable to be carried out.

Along with lack of funding, the specific actions to be taken are vague and do not state who will actually carry them out. For example, Action 19 states that research of Child Rights Training will take place, followed by the training of DCC staff members. There is no statement of what individual or organization will be given this task to carry out.

Comparison Summary

This comparison between two large world players' approaches to eradicating child poverty is hard to make, as both governments are structured differently. The timeline of the national initiative must also be taken into consideration – The United States' War on Poverty began in 1964, while the United Kingdom's Child Poverty Act was announced in 2010. Muncie's TEAMwork for Quality Living appears to be creating effective change within the community as a community-based grassroots organization,

while Derry's Action Plan appears to be lacking in implementation, but this could again be due to the time gap in creation.

Regardless of effectiveness, both cities have clearly acknowledged the issue of child poverty and the necessity to provide resources. It is now up to the leaders and volunteers within the cities and organizations to ensure that help is being provided and plans to reduce poverty are being followed through.

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